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AN OBSCURE PASSAGE FROM THE *PERIPLUS* :

*ΚΟΛΑΝΔΙΟΦΩΝΤΑ ΤΑ ΜΕΓΙΣΤΑ*¹

By ANTHONY CHRISTIE

IN the study of the early history of South East Asia the nature of the shipping which operated between India and the regions to the east has been the subject of much discussion. Sources for this study are rare enough and the fact that one of them, *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, § 60, is either corrupt, as Müller believed, or contains a difficult hapax legomenon, has proved something of a stumbling block. The text of the *Periplus* rests upon a single MS (Heidelberg : *Cod. Palatinus Gr. 398 saec. X ineuntis*) of which there is a fourteenth or fifteenth century copy in the British Museum (*Add. Mss. 19391*). The Heidelberg MS is obviously the work of a careful scribe and it is, in fact, much less corrupt than was thought by either Müller or Fabricius, both of whom appear to have been more familiar with classical Greek than with κοινή. Indeed, the scribe himself appears to have been less inclined than either of them to alter words or forms that were not within his reading, his general practice being to omit the accent in such cases. A critical edition of the text was prepared by Frisk in 1927, and he has dealt very fully with its general character as well as with that of the MS. This edition must be considered to be the only satisfactory one.²

The passage in question runs as follows :

ἐπισημότερα καὶ κατὰ τὸ ἐξῆς κείμενά ἐστιν ἐμπορία Καμάρα καὶ Ποδούκη καὶ Σωπάτμα, ἐν οἷς τοπικὰ μὲν ἐστὶν πλοῖα μέχρι Λιμυρικῆς παραλεγόμενα τὴν γῆν, ἕτερα δ' ἐκ μονοξύλων πλοίων μεγίστων ἀφαῖς ἐξευγμένα, λεγόμενα σάνγαρα· τὰ δὲ εἰς τὴν χρυσὴν καὶ εἰς τὸν Γάγγην διαίροντα κολανδιοφώντα τὰ μέγιστα.

The reference to coasting craft presents no difficulty, and there is general agreement that the σάνγαρα are craft of the catamaran type. The third category, however, which is that of ocean-going shipping has given rise to much discussion. Müller commented :

‘De significatione vocis κολανδιοφώντα nil asseverare audet. Accentu vox in cod. caret. Pro τὰ μέγιστα scrib. videtur ὄντα μέγιστα, nisi fuit κολάνδια ὄντα μέγιστα.’³

¹ This paper is based in part on my communication to the 23rd International Congress of Orientalists, Cambridge, 1954. I have to thank my colleague, Dr. A. C. Graham, for his assistance in discussion of the Chinese texts.

² C. Müller, *Geographi graeci minores*, Paris, 1853, I, 257–305 ; B. Fabricius, *Der Periplus des Erythraischen Meeres von einem Unbekannten*, Leipzig, 1883 ; H. Frisk, *Le Périphe de la Mer Erythrée*, Göteborg, 1927.

³ Müller, op. cit., 301.

Du Cange, as early as 1688, had been bolder. In his *Glossarium*, s.v. *ΚΟΛΑΝΔΙΟΦΩΝΤΟΝ*, he writes :

‘ Navigii barbarici genus. Arrianus in Periplo maris Erythraei. . . . Putabam legendum κελάνδια ὄντα &c.’¹

κελάνδιον he explains as a Byzantine fire-ship, but neither at this point, nor in the various Du Cange MSS, is there any explanation of the connexion between Far Eastern merchantmen and Byzantine fire-ships. The pattern of emendation proposed by Du Cange and by Müller has found general acceptance, and in the last 50 years various attempts have been made to discover in κολάνδια Sanskrit or Tamil words for boat, although the evidence for Indian ocean-going shipping at the beginning of the Christian era is singularly unsubstantial unless the assumption is first made that the passage in question refers to Indian bottoms. Thus, M. George Cédès,² Hornell,³ and Meile,⁴ have seen in the phrase, emended to read κολάνδια ὄντα (τὰ) μέγιστα, references to *kola*, *kūllān*, *kūlla*, and *kalam*, but the precise nature of these varied craft is difficult to determine. Monier Williams explains *kola* as a raft, while Hornell states that *kūllān* and *kūlla* are Tamil terms ‘ both for a large outrigger fishing canoe and for the outrigger frame alone ’. It is possible that these suggestions contain part of the matter, but it seems that, by the use of other sources for maritime activity in the seas of southern Asia, the elucidation of this text can be taken a stage further.

In the course of his study of Lin-i 林邑,⁵ M. R. A. Stein put forward the suggestion that an analogous form was to be found in Chinese. The *Shui-ching-chu* 水經注, which was written by Li Tao-yuan 酈道元 at the beginning of the sixth century A.D., contains an account of a naval battle in which the king of Lin-i was involved. The king’s ship was put out of control, but was rescued by another vessel, *k’un-lun-tan k’o* 崑崙單舸.⁶ M. Stein takes the opportunity to discuss various texts in connexion with this passage which throw light upon shipping in this area and concludes :

‘ On ne peut guère, je crois, séparer les *k’ouen-louen-tan* du CKT des *kolandia* du Périples. Nous avons ainsi un nouveau cas de renseignement concordant provenant des deux côtés de l’Inde transgangétique : les Chinois d’une part, les Grecs de l’autre ’.⁷

The reconstructed form of the phrase in question, **kuən-luən-tân*,⁸ con-

¹ Du Cange, *Glossarium ad scriptores mediae et infimae graecitatis*, Paris, 1688.

² G. Cédès, *Textes des auteurs grecs et latins relatifs à l’Extrême-Orient*, Paris, 1910, p. xvii, n. 1.

³ J. Hornell, *The origins and ethnological significance of Indian boat designs*. (Mem. As. Soc. Bengal, vii), Calcutta, 1920, 215.

⁴ P. Meile, ‘ Les Yavanas dans l’Inde tamoule ’, *J.As.*, 1940-1, 90-2.

⁵ R. A. Stein, ‘ Le Lin-yi ’, *Han-hiue* (Pekin), II, 1-3, 1947, 64-7. Cited as Stein.

⁶ *Shui-ching-chu* (Ssu pu ts’ung k’an ed.), ch. 36, 23 (a).

⁷ Stein, 67.

⁸ All the reconstructed forms are after B. Karlgren, *Analytic dictionary of Chinese and Japanese*.

sidered as the Chinese equivalent of a Greek representation of a native South East Asian term is probably as close as could be expected, but the correctness of the suggestion depends upon the acceptance of the conventional emendation. If this is set upon one side, another possibility exists which M. Stein does not appear to have considered, although he devotes some space to a consideration of the term involved, *po* 舶, which had earlier been the subject of some remarks by Pelliot.¹

According to Wan Chen 萬震, who wrote an account of the South during the Wu dynasty (A.D. 222–77),

‘foreigners [i.e. natives of S.E. Asia] call ships *po*. The biggest are 20 *chang* or more in length, and two or three *chang* above the waterline. Seen from above they resemble covered galleries (閣道). They carry six to seven hundred men and a cargo of 10,000 *hu*’.²

This seems to indicate a vessel of about 170 feet overall, with a freeboard of some 16 feet or more, though it is not clear what is included in height above the water. Another writer of Wu times, K’ang T’ai 康泰, who seems to have been the source for much of China’s knowledge of countries to the south, tells us that the ship which was used by Indo-Scythian (月支) traders for the transport of horses was also known as *po*.³ He also provides a tantalizing reference to monsoon trade between the island (or possibly province: the character is 州) of *Chia-na-t’iao* and *Ta-ch’in*, the passage, under seven sails, taking a month and a few days in a large *po*.⁴ Pelliot restored *Chia-na-t’iao* 加那調 as *Kanadvipa and noted that this name occurs in the Chinese version of the *Saddharmasmṛtyupasthana* as one of 500 small islands which surrounded Jambudvīpa.⁵ An alternative form could be *Ganadvīpa, possibly in the sense of archipelago, or as the name of an island known in the *Ramayana*.⁶ M. Stein, relying upon a postulated alternance *chia-na*—*na-chia* (= *naga*) has suggested Nagadvīpa and drawn attention to the Ptolemaic Nagadiba, which appears to have been a port in Ceylon, situated in the vicinity of the present Trincomali.⁷ None of these indications is sufficiently precise to enable us to identify the particular route in question, but the passages confirm the picture of a *po* as a large merchantman and associate such vessels with trade with the Roman Orient, a trade which was, above all, the concern of the writer of the *Periplus*. Further information is to be found in the *I-ch’ieh-ching yin-i* 一切經音義, a dictionary compiled by Huei-lin 慧琳 which according to Pelliot was com-

¹ P. Pelliot, ‘Textes chinois concernant l’Indochine hindouisée’, *Et.As.*, II, 243–63. Cited as Pelliot.

² *T’ai-p’ing-yü-lan* (*Ssu pu ts’ung k’an* ed.), ch. 769.

³ *T’ai-p’ing-yü-lan*, ch. 359.

⁴ *T’ai-p’ing-yü-lan*, ch. 771.

⁵ Pelliot, 251–2.

⁶ S. Lévi, ‘Pour l’histoire du Rāmāyana’, *J.As.*, 1918, 80.

⁷ Stein, p. 293, n. 347.

pleted in A.D. 817.¹ Huei-lin gives a number of instances of *po* and includes the following passage :

‘ Ssü-ma Piao, in his commentary on *Chuang Tzŭ*, says : “ large ocean-going ships are called *po* ”. According to the *Kuang ya* : “ *po* is an ocean-going ship ”. It has a draught of 60 feet (!). It is fast and carries 1000 men as well as merchandise. It is also called *k’un-lun-po* (亦曰崑崙舶) ’.²

He also gives certain details of the construction of the *po* to which we shall return. The *Kuang ya* 廣雅 was a dictionary compiled by Chang I 張揖 about A.D. 230. Ssü-ma Piao 司馬彪 lived from c. 240 to c. 305 A.D. Most of his commentary is lost, including this passage, and the word *po* does not appear in the text of *Chuang Tzŭ* as it is known to us. Pelliot commented : ‘ je doute que le mot 舶 *po* se rencontre dans le texte même de *Tchouang tseu*, au iv^e siècle de notre ère ’.³ Huei-lin also notes that the *po* were crewed either by men of *k’un-lun* 崑崙, variant *ku-lun* 骨論, or by Koreans (*kao-li* 高麗).

The evidence available in the Chinese sources can be summarized as follows. The large, non-Chinese, merchantmen which were engaged upon the trade between East and West were known as *po*, or as *k’un-lun-po*, a crucial variant. They were crewed, most often, by men of *k’un-lun*, a term in use for various littoral peoples of South East Asia (*vid. inf.* p. 351) and were sailing vessels. The earliest Chinese references appear to belong to the third century A.D., if we discount the faint possibility of the occurrence of the word in *Chuang Tzŭ*. These sources are, then, perhaps a century and a half later than the *Periplus* but it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that the shipping which they describe had not altered significantly over this period and it is most probable that it had been in existence for some considerable time. Indeed the development of ocean-going craft of this type is essentially a slow business, and it is extremely unlikely that there was any radical difference between the ships that sailed from the ports of South India for the Ganges and Chryse and those which still sailed these waters at the time of the arrival of the first European vessels. I do not therefore believe that any other source is likely to prove of greater assistance in the elucidation of the obscurity of this passage in the *Periplus* unless further MSS are discovered in the future.

The word *po* consists, in addition to the signific *chou* 舟 ‘boat’, of the character *pai* 白. It belongs therefore to a phonetic group for which Karlgren gives the values : Cantonese *pāk*, Ancient Chinese (sixth century A.D.), **b’øk*. Since the word *po* is clearly to be associated with the geographical area to which the term *k’un-lun* applies, it seems to be appropriate to postulate for *po* a South East Asian original of the order labial-vowel-velar/stop. Of these I have succeeded in finding the following instances :

¹ Taisho *Tripitaka*, No. 2128, ch. 61.

² The draught as printed is manifestly absurd. Pelliot proposed, with certain reservations, reading 入水六七尺, six or seven feet, for 六十尺. Pelliot, p. 258, n. 4.

³ Pelliot, p. 258, n. 2.

Sea Dyak ¹ :	<i>bong, bangkong, boon</i>
Old Mon ² :	<i>kḥan</i>
Mon :	<i>bɛŋ</i>
Car-Nicobar :	<i>ku-pôk</i>

(It is possible that Sea Dyak : *bidok*,³ Malau : *bidup*,⁴ and Sulus : *dapang*⁵ belong to the same group.)

Such a homorganic stop/nasal alternance is apparently characteristic of Mon-Khmer languages and there is little doubt that the Mon and Car-Nicobarese words belong to the same stem, which is of the order postulated for our South East Asian original. The Sea Dyak forms appear to belong here also, and it is possible that this whole group belongs to a South East Asian linguistic substratum which may perhaps be classified broadly as Malay. There is, unfortunately, very little reliable information about the vessels to which these names relate, but there are certain features in the descriptions of Sea Dyak war boats by Marryat,⁶ Horsburgh,⁷ and St. John,⁸ which may usefully be compared with the Chinese accounts of the *po*.

‘The Sea Dyak war boats are well constructed and good models, and very fast; some will hold as many as sixty or seventy men, with two months’ provisions. The keel is flat, with a curve or sheer of hard wood. A long one does not exceed six fathoms, and upon it they will build up a boat of eleven fathoms overall. . . . They caulk the seams with a bark which is plentiful in the jungle’ (St. John). Marryat describes and illustrates a feature ‘a flat strong roof, from which they fight’ (obviously to be distinguished from the conventional awnings, *kajang*, made from the leaves of nipa palm), which is reminiscent of Wan Chen’s observation that the *po* seen from above resembles a covered gallery. The methods of construction and propulsion as described by Horsburgh may be compared with that of the *po* as described by Huei-lin, the latter being rearranged to parallel Horsburgh’s account.

¹ H. Ling Roth, *The natives of Sarawak and British North Borneo*, London, 1896. The word lists are at Vol. II, App. I.

bong (loc. cit., p. iv), *bangkong* (loc. cit., p. vii) are both recorded by Brooke Low for Rejang and Batang Lupar District.

boon was recorded by my colleague, Mr. N. C. Scott, from a Sea Dyak informant. I am indebted to him for this information.

² I am indebted to my colleague, Mr. H. S. Shorto, for the Mon and Car-Nicobarese terms. Attempts have been made to associate them with Dravidian *kappal*, but Mr. Shorto informs me that these are misconceived. I am grateful to him for allowing me to anticipate his publication on this point.

³ Recorded by Brereton : Ling Roth, loc. cit., p. cxviii.

⁴ Brereton : loc. cit., p. cxviii.

⁵ Recorded by Cowie : loc. cit., p. elix. I hope to return to a detailed study of these and other words in connexion with a study of S.E. Asian maritime cultures.

⁶ F. M. Marryat, *Borneo and the Indian Archipelago*, London, 1848.

⁷ A. Horsburgh, *Sketches in Borneo*, London (?), 1858.

⁸ S. St. John, *Life in the forests of the Far East*, London, 1862.

*Horsburgh*¹

The lunas, or keel plank, being properly laid down, the first side plank is brought and placed, with its lower or plain edge, upon the ledge of the keel-plank. The ledge of the first side-plank being thus uppermost, it becomes in turn the ledge upon which the lower edge of the second side-plank must rest. The ledges of the keel-plank, and of the first side-plank, are then pierced, and firm rattan lashings passed from the one to the other.

. . . when they have in this manner put on as many planks as they wish (generally four or five on each side), they caulk the seams so as to render the boat watertight. Hence in the construction of their boats they not only employ no nails, treenails, or bolts, but even no timbers—nothing but planks ingeniously lashed together by rattans, and then caulked.

To propel their boats they employ paddles . . . never oars and seldom sails.

*Huei-lin*²

They build the boats by binding together planks of wood, for the thin planks are likely to break (*a*).

They use cords made from coconut fibre for lashings and they caulk with the resin of canarium (*b*) to make them watertight. Neither nails nor iron plates are used, for fear that the iron, becoming heated, might cause a fire (*c*).

The ships are propelled by the wind: human strength would be unable to shift them.

Notes

(*a*) The passage is obscure. Pelliot translated: 'Ils construisent [les navires] en assemblant [plusieurs épaisseurs] de planches de bordage, car les planches sont minces et ils craignent qu'elles rompent'.³ Stein proposes: 'Ils sont faits en bois (troncs d'arbres ?) assemblés, car des minces planches risqueraient de se briser'.⁴

The text has 疊木枋爲之.

It seems very unlikely that the writer had seen a *po* under construction, and it is arguable that, hearing that the planks were *lei*, bound together, he misunderstood the technique and added a quite unnecessary, indeed erroneous, explanation. The method is, in fact, one which was described by Marco Polo for Persian Gulf ships which were, significantly in this connexion, used for the East Indian trade.⁵

¹ Horsburgh, 36.

² Huei-lin, ch. 61.

³ Pelliot, 260.

⁴ Stein, 66.

⁵ *Travels of Marco Polo* (ed. Yule-Cordier), Vol. 1, p. 108. Actually these Gulf vessels were of mixed construction, the 'laced' planks being fastened to the stem and stern-posts with tree-nails.

(b) Reading, after Pelliot, *kan-lan-t'ang* 橄欖糖 for *ko-lan-t'ang* 葛覽糖. Pelliot notes that this substance is recorded elsewhere as a caulking medium for ocean-going ships.¹ Horsburgh gives no details of the caulking, while St. John refers to the use of bark.

(c) Horsburgh notes that 'it is true that these lashings are not very durable, as the rattans soon get rotten ; but this is of little consequence, since, whenever a boat returns from an expedition, the lashings are cut and the planks being separated, are taken up into the house. When she is again wanted the planks are taken down, and the boat reconstructed as before'. Pelliot records that 'la legende courante était qu'on n'employait pas de fer à raison des montagnes d'aimant qui arrachaient le fer des flancs des navires'. The technical explanation, for some, at least, of the boats of South Asia, is that this method of construction allows a desirable degree of flexibility for vessels which are designed for beaching upon certain types of Asian coast.²

There can be little doubt that the *po* and the Sea Dyak war boat belong to the same order of naval architecture, though the latter with its crew of up to 80 men (Marryat), primarily employed on rivers or in coastal waters, though occasionally met with up to 40 miles to sea (St. John), is but a poor relation of the former, up to 170 feet or more overall, with 600 or 700 souls aboard and a large cargo, designed for the maritime trade. The problem is made the greater by the obvious exaggerations and lack of technical knowledge in the Chinese sources, not wholly surprising in a country which does not appear to have developed its own merchant marine until some centuries after the date of these texts. Despite these difficulties and the admitted discrepancies, notably in the method of propulsion which is determined largely by the difference in size, the multiple banked galley being apparently unknown in eastern waters, the evidence, both technical and linguistic, seems to justify the hypothesis that a type of ship, suited to ocean trading and native to the area in which it is still to be found in a smaller form, was known to the Chinese, under the name of *po* or *k'un-lun-po*, to be engaged in trade with the West. A century or so earlier the writer or compiler of the *Periplus* records that ships sail from the ports of South India for the Ganges and Chryse, *κολανδιοφωντα τὰ μέγιστα*. It remains to collate these two sources of information.

The term *k'un-lun*, with its variants, has given rise to a considerable literature, but it is not necessary to discuss the whole problem *ab initio* since there appears to be a considerable measure of agreement as to its significance in South East Asia. It seems to have been employed as an ethnic term, sometimes perhaps descriptive would be more accurate, for certain peoples of this region who lived near the coasts, had dark skins and frizzy hair, and who, among other activities, crewed ocean-going boats. In addition it is used as a transcription for certain South East Asian words of the series KRNasal, meaning

¹ Pelliot, p. 260, n. 1

² Horsburgh, 36 ; Pelliot, p. 260, n. 3.

king or ruler, e.g. Old Khmer : *kurun* (Khmer : *kruñ*) ; Cam : *klaun*. Such a usage accords well with the Chinese practice of subsuming country, people, and ruler under a single term. But the most usual meaning of *k'un-lun*, and one which must inevitably have come into the mind of a native reader, is the mountain which is part of the mythical as well as of the real geography of China. By the fourth century B.C. Mt. K'un-lun had been equated with Meru, of which the Chinese seem to have heard from Indian travellers who followed the land-route to China. There is, however, an earlier use of the term as ethnic, for in the so-called Tribute of Yü it occurs as a tribal name.¹ By the end of the third century B.C. the Ch'in emperor, Shih Huang, was despatching maritime expeditions to seek for the Isles of the Immortals conceived of as Mt. K'un-lun resting upon the back of a tortoise. K'un-lun has become oceanic, and from then on the ambivalence persists, but the theme of mountain, at once real and magical, perhaps with a faint ethnic tinge, though this is much less certain, remains constant. If as I believe, and here I follow and develop an idea put forward by Henri Maspero,² the equivalence *k'un-lun*—*Meru* was derived from Indian traders who arrived in China by the land-route, the transfer of this term to the South East, when, on the disruption of this route by barbarian movements, commerce shifted to the southern, maritime routes, did not destroy its association with trade with the West. Further, it became apparent, as Chinese knowledge of the southern peoples grew, that here too was a region of magical and potent mountains. That this was recognized can be shown not only by the accounts of the kingdoms there, but by their name, Fu-nan 扶南, for one of these, for there can be no doubt that the reconstructed form **b'ju-nām*, is the equivalent of Old Khmer *bnam* (mod : *phnom*). M. Cœdès, following Finot, has already drawn attention to the fact that the kings of Fu-nan were entitled 'King of the Mountain', *parvatabhūpāla* or *śailarāja*, for which there exists an Old Khmer form *kurun bnam*.³ We may now add that, by a process of logopoiea which frequently characterizes Chinese versions of foreign terms, *k'un-lun* will not only transcribe *kurun*, but will also, by virtue of its own implicit significance as 'potent mountain', translate the whole phrase *kurun bnam*.

We may now return to the *κολανδιοφωντα* of the *Periplus*. It has been generally the practice, in previous discussions of this problem, to seek for a word for boat in the first element of the term, and to resolve the existing complex by the omission of *φ* into *κολάνδια ὄντα*. But examination of the Chinese sources, and the terms from South East Asia, suggests that the *φ* is, in fact, essential, being the initial of a regional word for boat. Further, it may be argued that the first element is a Greek representation of the term which the

¹ *Shu-ching*, ed. Legge, in *Chinese Classics*, Vol. III, i, Pt. i, 83 (p. 127).

² H. Maspero, 'Influences occidentales en Chine avant les Han', *Études historiques* (Mélanges posthumes, Vol. III), Paris, 1950, 46–8.

³ L. Finot, 'Sur quelques traditions indochinoises', *Mélanges Sylvain Lévi*, Paris, 1911, 203 ; G. Cœdès, 'On the origin of the Sailendras of Indonesia', *JGIS*, I, 67.

Chinese rendered as *k'un-lun*. As a working hypothesis the following equivalences are proposed :

	<i>Ethnic</i>	<i>Boat</i>
S.E. Asian :	*KvRvN	*BvN
Chinese :	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} k'un-lun \\ *kuən-luən \end{array} \right.$	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} po \\ *b'ok \end{array} \right.$
Greek :	κολανδιο	φωντα

If we assume that the Greek is not corrupt, the forms present several problems. In the ethnic component the δ might be explained as a homorganic plosive, but it would be unexpected in Greek. Alternatively, it could be explained as a copyist's error, influenced by the preceding διαίροντα. Similarly, *φωντα as a neuter plural would be unusual, for if a nom. sing. *φων be postulated, one would have expected a plural φοντα. In my original study of this passage¹ I suggested tentatively that the group was to be resolved as *κολανδίοφα ὄντα, but further study of the text has led me to the view that this is unsatisfactory. It now seems to me best to consider κολανδιοφωντα as a corrupt form which originally represented some compound of the same general order as *k'un-lun po*. If the hypothesis which has been advanced here is accepted, it may be possible for the specialist in post-classical Greek to propose emendations which will finally resolve the problem which seems likely to remain insoluble otherwise in the absence of other MSS of the *Periplus*. On the same hypothesis, it may be that those Indian forms, such as *küllān*, which have been adduced as origins for the Greek term, may indeed belong in the same category, the ethnic component having remained in use after the term for boat has dropped out of circulation. In any event I believe that future research into this problem should take into account the postulated equivalences $\text{κολανδιοφωντα} = KvRvN BvN = k'un-lun po$.

¹ *Proc. XXIII Int. Congr. Or.*, [1957], 291-2.